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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KAMPALA 000312

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PREF MARR MOPS UG CG SU
SUBJECT: UGANDA/DRC: OPERATION LIGHTENING THUNDER UPDATE
(MARCH 25, 2009)

REF: A. KINSHASA 266
B. KAMPALA 311

Classified By: Ambassador Steven Browning for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary: This cable is the first of periodic updates on the regional military operation against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) known as Operation Lightning Thunder (OLT). This report is not meant to provide an overarching narrative or polished analysis of OLT, but rather offers spot information gleaned in Uganda only, from credible U.S. Mission sources here. We recognize the regional scope of OLT and the fact that our sources may be limited in their knowledge and perspective on OLT. End Summary.

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MILITARY SITUATION
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12. (S NF) LRA Plans and Intentions. The UPDF believes that the LRA's current strategy is to split into different directions to overstretch the allied forces, leaving elements behind to watch over their safehavens. This strategy includes moving families and abductees to safer places to have a future LRA force not affected by current operations. Smaller groups led by well-known LRA commanders will attack local populations and massively abduct and kill civilians to ensure the LRA's presence is felt. The LRA will then regroup at a later date and make fresh demands for peace talks while they recover from the damage caused by OLT and plan for further terror operations.

13. (C) MONUC's Redeployment Plans. The UN Mission in Congo (MONUC) is redeploying forces to further support the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) now that it is in charge of Phase II of OLT (ref B). On March 23, Slobadan Kotevski Didi, the head of MONUC's Kampala Office told P/E Chief that he had just returned from Goma, DRC where he participated in discussions with the UN Secretary General's Special Representative Alan Doss and MONUC Force Commander General Babakar Gaye. Didi said that MONUC had planned to deploy troops in support of FARDC to Doruma, Duru, and Faradje in May, when it thought OLT's mandate would expire. However, the new arrangement between the Congolese and Ugandan forces meant that MONUC had to speed up the deployments. The first step would be bringing in more troops to Dungu. These troops would then be staged in company-sized elements to Doruma, Duru, and Faradje. In addition to a Moroccan company at Duru, MONUC plans to send a company of Indonesian engineers to speed up the completion of the road between Dungu and Duru. A Joint Protection Team of military commanders, protection officers, and Demobilization, Disarmament, Rehabilitation, Reinsertion, and Reintegration (DDRRR) experts would be established at Dungu.

14. (C) MONUC will reportedly provide logistics support and food for the additional FARDC troops, which Didi understands

to include two additional brigades coming from the Kivus. Didi said the operation lacks enough helicopter support and suggested that the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) might be a source of additional mobility if needed. Didi said that it is MONUC's understanding that Ugandan troops remain on Congolese soil, with Kabila's consent. MONUC's Force Commander, General Gaye, reports good cooperation with the Ugandan military.

¶5. (C) LRA Movements. MONUC's information on LRA locations and movement as reported in reftel A paragraph 10 are accurate and came from the Ugandan military.

¶6. (C) External Support for the LRA (refer to Reftel A). The African Inland Mission (AIM) airstrip at Banda is controlled by African Inland Church (AIC), but Medicines Sans Frontieres (MSF) has been using it over the past months to bring in medical supplies and doctors. MSF has been maintaining the airstrip, but has not been in Banda for the past several weeks. There is a radio and a radio operator at Banda. AIMAIR (AIM's aviation branch is based out of Wilson Airport in Nairobi) has been flying all over the Garamba National Park area dropping off canvasses (tarps) and relief supplies to the people whose houses have been burned down and destroyed by the LRA. AIMAIR was using a King Air aircraft that may have been into Banda some days prior to the attack. They were doing numerous supply drops in the area with the King Air aircraft.

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POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT
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¶7. (SBU) LRA spokesman David Matsanga orchestrated an open letter from the "Women of the Greater North" calling for a renewal of the peace process. The letter appeared in the Government and independent newspapers in Uganda and in various other media outlets in Kenya and Tanzania. The "Women of the Greater North" is a creation of the LRA peace negotiators during the Juba Peace Process, which tried to create the illusion of support for LRA demands. Gulu District Officials tell us that members of the group are widely viewed with suspicion because its members used travel to and from the Rikwangba assembly area during the peace process to deliver supplies to the LRA.

¶8. (SBU) The lack of public information on the Ugandan "withdrawal" has led to some confusion in northern Uganda about the status of OLT. The Acholi Religious Leaders met with 40 cross-border community leaders from the DRC last week in Gulu. All of the participants expressed their concern about the future of the operation. Some of the Congolese participants were worried that defecting LRA would not turn themselves into the Congolese military because they fear retribution for the LRA massacres of civilians in December 2008 and early January 2009. The Congolese participants recommended that the UPDF remain in DRC.

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HUMANITARIAN SITUATION
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¶9. (C) MONUC believes that small scale LRA attacks on local villages will continue. Didi believes it will take some time for the LRA to mount a massive attack on civilians because it will use small raids to resupply and figure out the current military presence on the ground. Didi reports that recent attacks indicate the LRA forces are moving in a southwesterly direction, deeper into DRC.

BROWNING